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CENTRO SCAVI DI TORINO  
PER IL MEDIO ORIENTE E L'ASIA

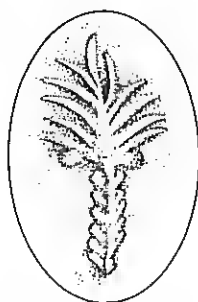
# MESOPOTAMIA

RIVISTA DI ARCHEOLOGIA, EPIGRAFIA E  
STORIA ORIENTALE ANTICA

*a cura del Dipartimento di Scienze Antropologiche,  
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## FIRE TEMPLE AND ANAHITA TEMPLE: A DISCUSSION ON SOME IRANIAN PLACES OF WORSHIP

During the past few decades many scholarly works have been devoted to the pre-Islamic Iranian religious monuments. These have culminated in Klaus Schippmann's outstanding work, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer*<sup>1</sup>. Schippmann's conclusion rely basically on archaeological discoveries<sup>2</sup>.

Fifteen years have passed since this work was published, and new materials have been unearthed providing us with new information which makes a reinterpretation of some of the previously excavated sites possible.

This paper consecrates on reviewing a few of the previously discovered monuments in the light of these discoveries. I hope to suggest the function of some of these monuments.

\* \* \*

Units 104 and 114 in Hājīābād, a recently excavated 4th century site in southern Iran<sup>3</sup>, are similar in plan with the so-called « Palace » and the square building of 3rd century Bīšāpūr. The square area 114 corresponds to the temple and the cruciform room (L. 104), to the Palace. In both sites, the two areas are connected (Figs. A and B).

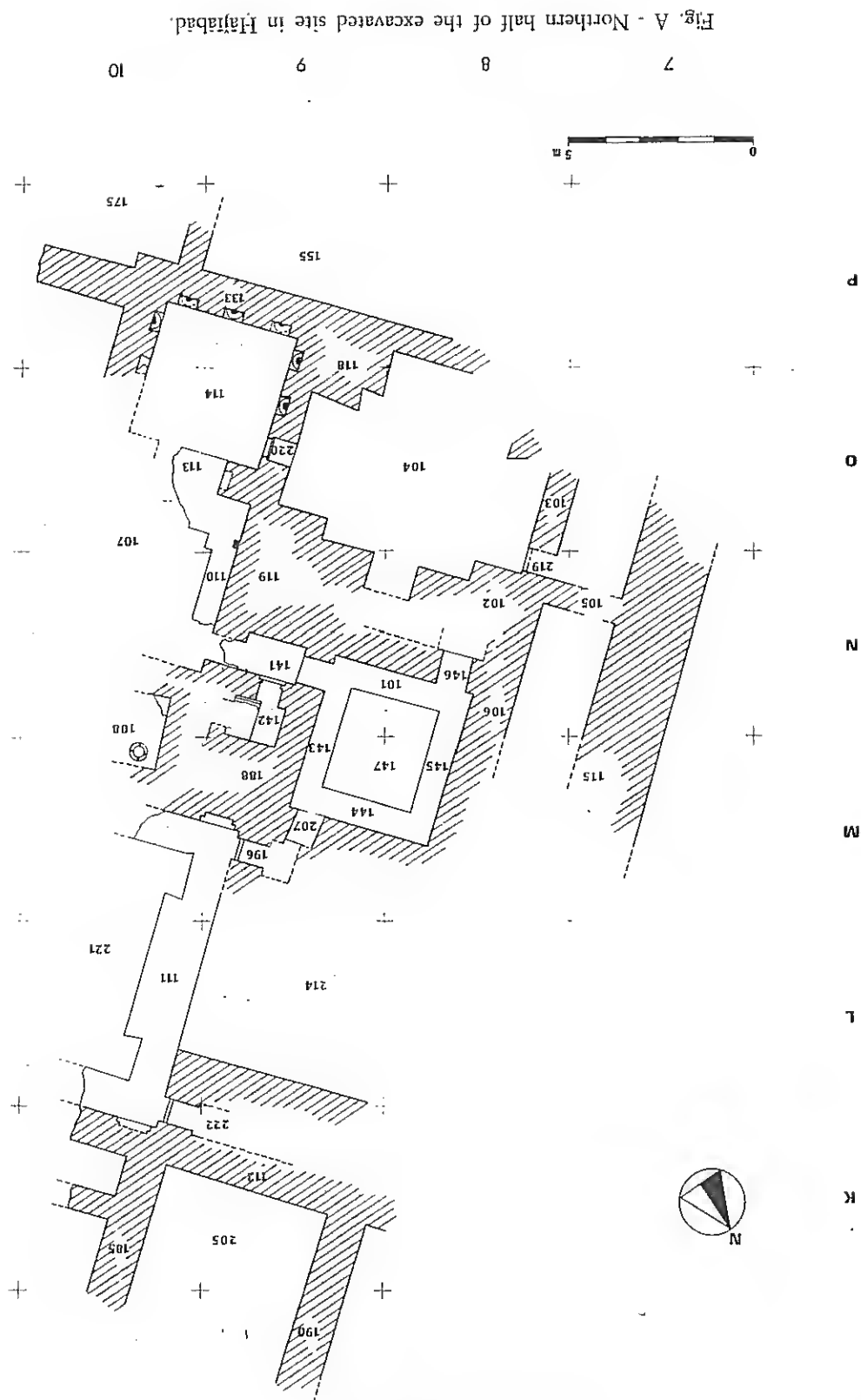
Sarfaraz completed the excavation of the square monument and discovered an interesting system for the circulation of water ending in the center of the building. This led him to the conclusion that the monument must have been a temple of Anāhita<sup>4</sup>. The name *Apān Kānak* (house of waters)

<sup>1</sup> (Berlin, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 476.

<sup>3</sup> M. AZARNOUSH, « Excavations at Hājīābād, 1977; first preliminary report », *Iranica Antiqua* 18 (1983), pp. 159-76; Id., « Les Fouilles de Hājīābād (Iran), 1977 », in *Arabie orientale, Mésopotamie et Iran méridional de l'Age du Fer au début de la période islamique* (Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984), pp. 307-13.

<sup>4</sup> A. A. SARFARAZ, « Anahita, Ma'abad-e Bozorg-e Bīšāpūr », (Anāhita, the great Temple at Bīšāpūr - - in Persian), in *Proceedings of the IIIrd Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran, 2nd-7th november 1974* (Teheran, 1975), Persian section, p. 59. It would be remembered that the original excavator(s) of this monument, G. Salles and R. Ghirshman, had first called it « temple du feu » (Id., « Châpour, Rapport préliminaire de la première campagne de fouilles », *Revue des Arts Asiatiques* 10 (1936), pp. 119-20; R. GHIRSHMAN, « Les



by which Denkart refers to Anāhita temples<sup>5</sup> favors Sarfaraz's identification.

If this identification is correct we can assume that in this place the goddess is represented by water.

The comparable area 114 in Hājīābād shows no trace of water. Here the goddess is portrayed in a more tangible, less abstract, manner. Statues of

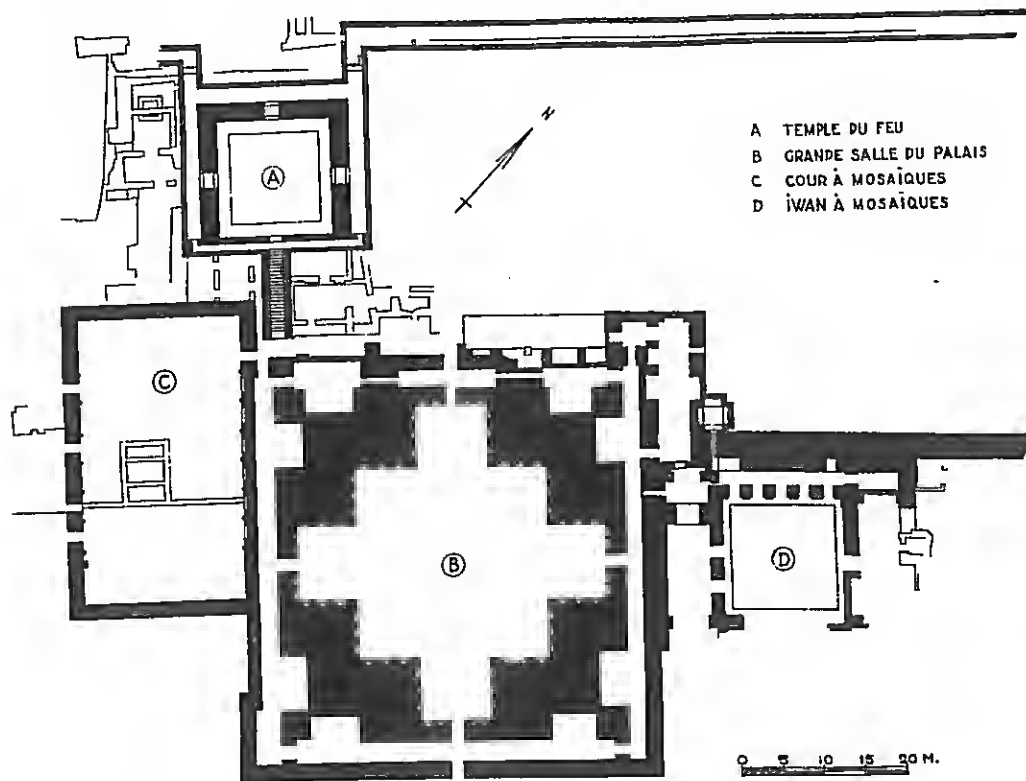


Fig. B - The « Palace » and Temple of Bīšāpūr (from R. GHIRSHMAN, *Bichapour*, Paris, vol. 2: Plan 2).

almost lifesize clad women, which once stood in niches around this area, as well as statuettes of both nude and clad women are probably Anāhita's

Fouilles de Châpour », *RAA* 12 (1938), pp. 14-15; G. SALLES, « Nouveaux Documents sur les Fouilles de Châpour », *RAA* 13 (1939-1942), pp. 3-4; R. GHIRSHMAN, *Bichapour*, 2 vols., Paris, 1956-1971, vol. 2, p. 11). Later, Ghirshman attributed the monument to the cult of Anāhita with no further explanation (*Iran, Parthes et Sassanides*, Paris, 1962, p. 149).

<sup>5</sup> C. TREVER, « A propos des temples de la déesse Anahita en Iran sassanide, *Iranica Antiqua* 7 (1967), p. 125.

anthropomorphic representations<sup>6</sup>. Lion heads, eagles with open wings, and zebus as well as a Dyonisiac scene found in the stucco decoration of the room, may also be attributes of the goddess' cult.

Room 114 in Hājīābād and the square building in Bīšāpūr both probably were related to Anāhīta's cult.

The cruciform hall of Bīšāpūr was identified by Ghirshman as « le Palais » or « la grande salle d'un palais »<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, nothing was discovered inside the hall which could be used to determine its function.

In the case of room 104 of Hājīābād the situation is identical. In this room as well, nothing was found to help us with its function. Unlike the square building of Bīšāpūr and area 114 of Hājīābād we have no feedback on their function. Thus a comparison of the Palace of Bīšāpūr and room 104 of Hājīābād with some other building can be helpful.

Regardless of its interior partition, the lay out of the central temple of Nūšījān, a monument from about 750 B.C., corresponds almost exactly to that of the « Audience Hall » of Bīšāpūr and room 104 of Hājīābād, and the presence of a well preserved fire altar indicates without doubt its religious function<sup>8</sup> (Fig. C, L. 1).

If the similarity in plan between the Central Temple of Nūšījān and the « Palace » of Bīšāpūr can be considered sufficient proof we can conclude that the « Palace » was a fire temple. This suggested function of the « Palace » of Bīšāpūr fits particularly well with its plan. Like so many Čahār Tāqs, the hall is surrounded by four corridors, separating this holy place from its profane environment<sup>9</sup>.

Areas 104 of Hājīābād and the « Palace » of Bīšāpūr, both have the same plan and are respectively connected to area 114 of Hājīābād and the square temple of Bīšāpūr. The two latter areas, as we previously saw, had similar function. Similarity of form in the case of 104 and the Palace, therefore, can be taken as a token of their common function as well. Area 104 in Hājīābād, thus, may have been a fire temple; like Nūšījān's central temple.

<sup>6</sup> M. AZARNOUSH, « Excavations at Hājīābād », pp. 171, 4; Id., « Fouilles de Hājīābād », p. 312.

<sup>7</sup> R. GHIRSHMAN, « Fouilles de Châpour », pp. 15-16; Id., *Parthes et Sassanides*, p. 139.

<sup>8</sup> M. ROAF and D. STRONACH, « Tepe Nūsh-i Jān, 1970: second interim Report », *Iran* 2 (1973), pp. 133-36; D. STRONACH, « Excavations at Tepe Nūsh-i Jān », in *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archäologie, München, 7-10. sept. 1976*, (Berlin 1979), pp. 157-58; D. STRONACH and M. ROAF, « Excavations at Tepe Nūsh-i Jān, Part I: A third interim report », *Iran* 16 (1978), pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> D. HUFF, « Sasanian » Čahār Tāqs in Fars », in *Proceedings of the IIIrd Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran, Tehran, Iran, 2nd-7th november 1974* (Tehran, 1975), p. 247.

But the question is not that simple. I mean that we cannot decide about the similarity of function of two buildings similar in plan if these two are parts of greater complexes, the form and function of the remaining part of which differ so widely as do the remaining part of Nūšijān and Bīšāpūr complexes.

If we do not go one step further in comparing the two monuments to each other, their similarity will appear purely formal, uninteresting, and even negligible. Negligible because it could be accidental.

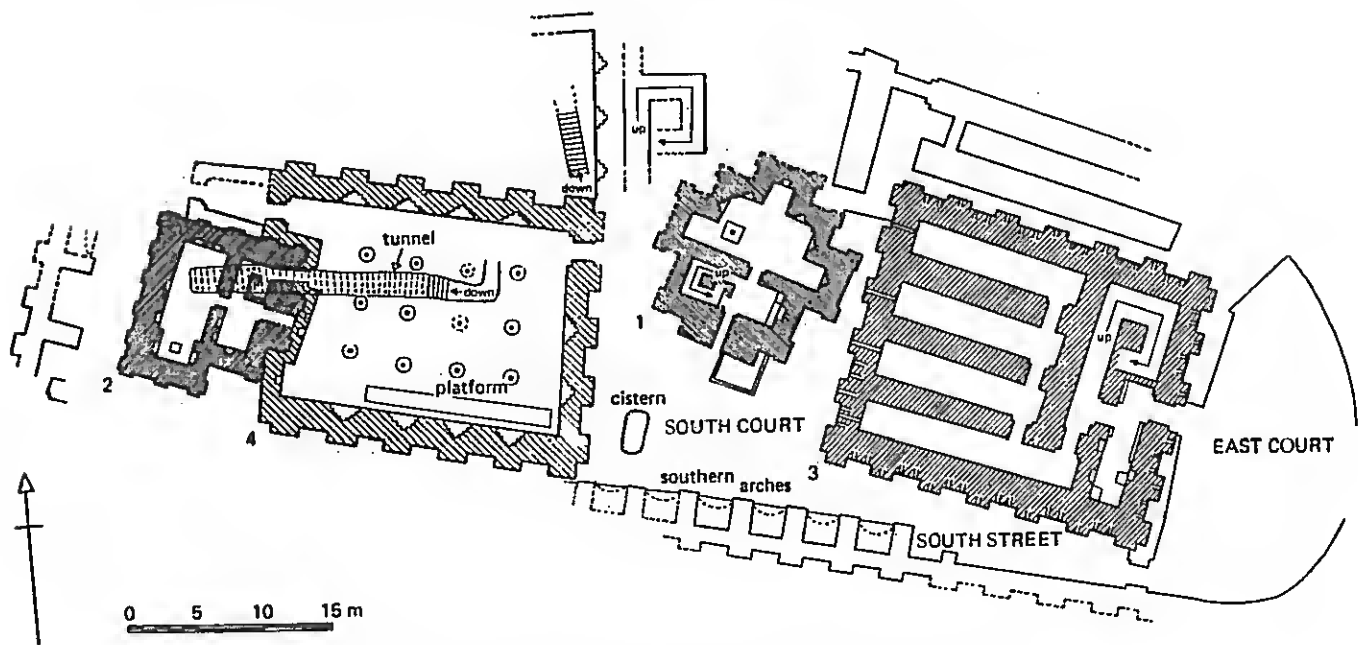


Fig. C - Nūšijān (from: D. STRONACH, « Tepe Nūsh-i Jān: The Median Settlement », in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2: Fig. 1, p. 833).

Among the remaining sections of Nūšijān, the Old Western Temple (Fig. C, L. 2) is the only one which is supposed by the excavators to have had a religious function<sup>10</sup>. The Columned Hall (Fig. C, L. 4), according to the excavators had some « ceremonial purposes »<sup>11</sup>. In the published reports, however, the essence of these ceremonies remains unexplained. Two factors enhance the ambiguity of the situation.

On the one hand, the Columned Hall is suggested to represent one of

<sup>10</sup> D. STRONACH and M. ROAF, « Nūsh-i Jān, third interim report », pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 3-6.



the « three chief branches of the Median State..., the Court... »<sup>12</sup> and the tunnel inside it is supposed to be source of « safe, internal water supply »<sup>13</sup> or « to supplement the water supply »<sup>14</sup>; on the other hand, it is extremely difficult to explain why the entrance to this tunnel « had to be cut from the center of one of the main building »<sup>15</sup>, namely the hall under discussion. An attempt has been made to identify the hall as a building of secular function, despite the undeniable fact that one does not need to have water right inside a hall of secular ceremonial function.

The function of the tunnel aside, why should a ruler build a ceremonial hall between two religious monuments and on the peak of a hill where there is scarcely enough room for such a building? Moreover, as C. Goff has rightly noted, the hall at Nūšijān stands on its own and is not flanked by rooms « to form a residential unit »<sup>16</sup>.

The fact that a cistern or well already existed at Nūšijān<sup>17</sup>, and that a tunnel or well cut from sides of the mound could reach the underground water table faster and easier<sup>18</sup>, makes the theory of a secure internal water source (as the *raison d'être* of the tunnel) unlikely.

These factors together with the very close links which exist between the Columned Hall and the Old Western Temple lead me to suggest a religious function for the hall. The tunnel was probably intended to provide the Columned Hall with fresh water (whose source probably had to be independent from that of the common use — namely from the well or cistern in the south court), in order to fit the religious complex of Nūšijān to (new?) religious requirements.

<sup>12</sup> M. ROAF and D. STRONACH, « Tepe Nūsh-i Jān: second interim report », p. 129. Not in all works concerning the columned hall, the excavators have so clearly suggested a function for this monument. For example in D. STRONACH, « La Découverte du premier Temple Mède », while the excavator speaks of two temples and the fort (thus spelling out their function by so calling them) he describes the columned hall: « la salle hypostyle » (*Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, séances de l'année 1977*, pp. 692-6) without more elaboration. In the same article, however, he compares this hall with the Achaemenid columned halls. Can this comparison be taken as a suggestion of the hall's function as a ceremonial structure, like the Achaemenid ones?

<sup>13</sup> D. STRONACH, « Découverte du premier temple Mède », p. 688; Id., « Excavations at Nūsh-i Jān », p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> D. STRONACH and M. ROAF, « Nūsh-i Jān, third interim report », p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> C. GOFF, « Excavation at Babajan: the architecture of the East mound, levels II and III », *Iran* 15 (1977), p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> D. STRONACH and M. ROAF, « Nūsh-i Jān, third interim report », p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Compare the plan of the site (*ibidem*, Fig. 1) with its contour map (D. STRONACH, « Excavations at Tepe Nūsh-i Jān, 1967, *Iran* 7 (1969), Fig. 2). A tunnel cut from the eastern slope of the East court, for example, could save up from 5 to 6 meters.

Archaeological and literary sources support the proposed function for the Columned Hall.

*Die Steinbauten* of Tak̄t-e Solaymān (to the west of the Central room A, Fig. D) comprise several sections among which the *Rundpfeilersaal* PB<sup>19</sup> (Fig. E).

The hall has two rows of four round pillars. Of note, is the water circulation system in the eastern side of the hall<sup>20</sup>.

The discovery of several small altars inside this hall and a large one in the *Sanktuarium* (room PD), indicates, beyond any possible doubt, the religious character of the hall<sup>21</sup>.

Here, again, a columned hall, built in the vicinity of a cruciform religious monument (room A) and provided with a water supply system, has a religious character.

Ābān Yašt provides us with further suggestive data. Here, the Anāhīta temple is described (paragraphs 101-102) as a multicolumned building (or better palace) on the bank of wide water sources<sup>22</sup>.

There are reasons to believe that under the Achaemenids, temples to Anāhīta were monuments with columned spaces, as described in the Avesta<sup>23</sup>.

It is clear that a columned hall, provided with water and showing a possible religious function has all the potential of being an Anāhīta temple, as noted in the goddess' Yašt. These conditions are fulfilled by the round pillar hall of Tak̄t-e Solaymān (PB).

Due to the similarity between the columned hall of Nūšijān and that of Tak̄t-e Solaymān (both columned halls have rooms at the end, both are provided—or attempted to be provided—with water, and both built in the vicinity of a cross-shaped monument of the same function), I suggest that the Columned

<sup>19</sup> D. HUFF, « Grabung westlich des grossen Feuertempels », in R. NAUMANN et al., « Takht-i Suleiman, Bericht über die Ausgrabungen 1965-1973 », *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1975), p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> Im Plattenfussboden des östlichen Seitenschiffs ist ein System vom Wasserrinnen und -becken angelegt (Abb. 51). Von einem Hauptkanal, der in ein rechteckiges Becken mit Ausfluss einmündet, zweigt eine U-förmig verlaufende Rinne ab, die eine ca. 1.50 x 2.00 m grosse, mit mehreren Ziegelschichten untermauerte Fläche umschloss. Weiter Wasserbecken liegen im gleichen Seitenschiff und zwischen den seitlichen Eingangstüren des Westschiffes (D. HUFF, « Grabung westlich des grossen Feuertempels », p. 152).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> J. DARMESTETER, trans., *The Sîrôzahs, Yast and Nyâyis*, The Sacred Books of the East, ed. F. M. MÜLLER, 23 (Oxford, 1880), p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> POLYBIUS, *The Histories*, trans. W. R. PATON, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. CAPPS et al., pp. 128, 137-38, 159-61, 6 vols. (London, 1922-1927), vol. 4: X.27. 9-13. Aene, in Polybius' text, is supposed to be Anāhīta (M. BOYCE, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, 2 vols., Leiden, 1975-1982, vol. 2, p. 219).

# TAKHT-I-SULEIMAN SASANIDISCHE PERIODEN

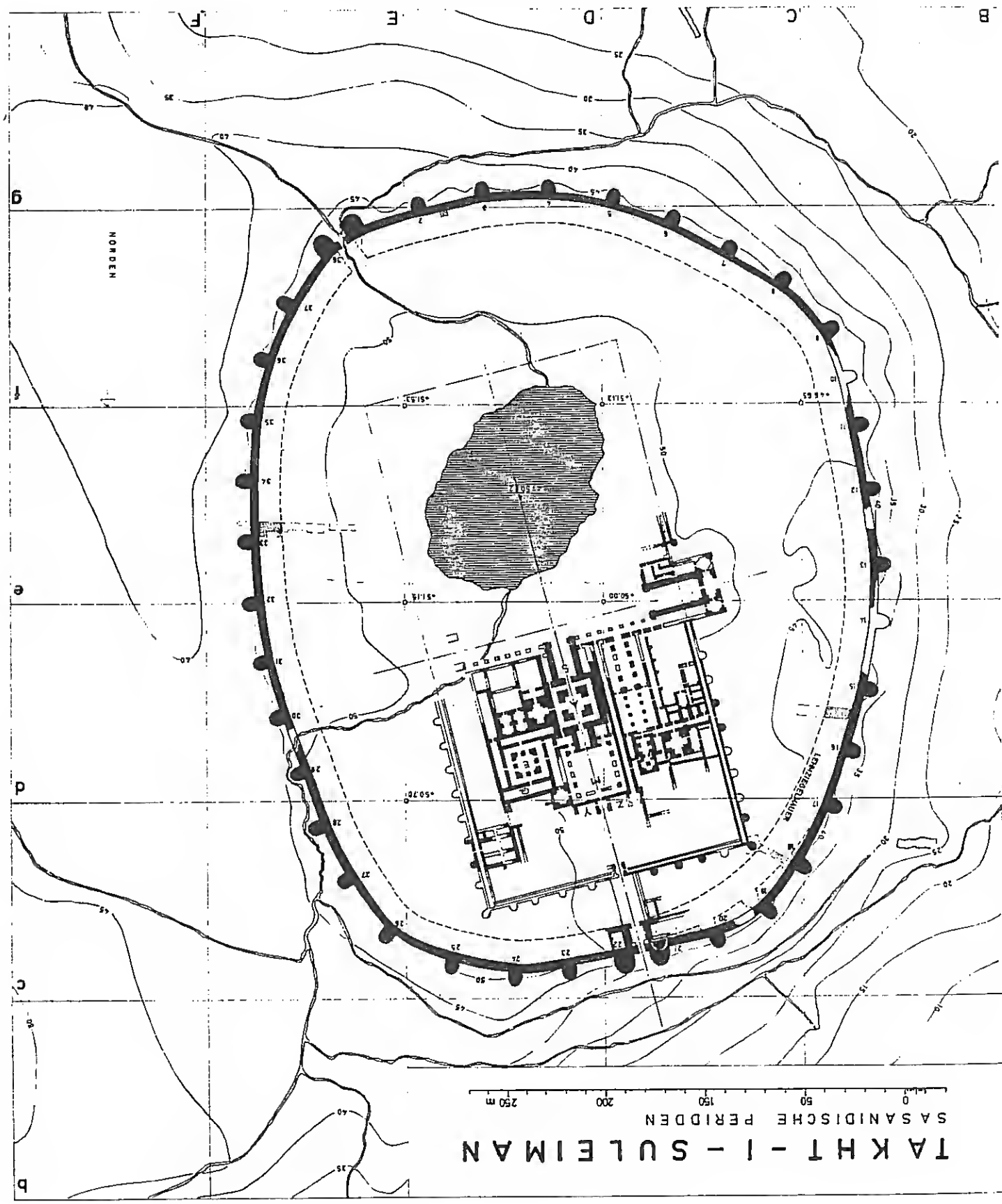
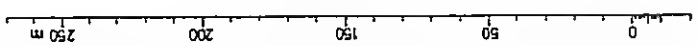


Fig. D - Takht-e Solaymān, general view (from R. NAUMANN, «Die Äussere Befestigung», *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1975), Fig. 1).

Hall of Nūšijān had a function similar to that of *die Steinbauten* of Tak̄t-e Solaymān.

Čahār Sotūn, a small building in the vicinity of an abandoned Sassanian town in the Hājiābād area, provides the strongest proof for identifying the function of both the columned halls in Tak̄t-e Solaymān and Nūšijān.

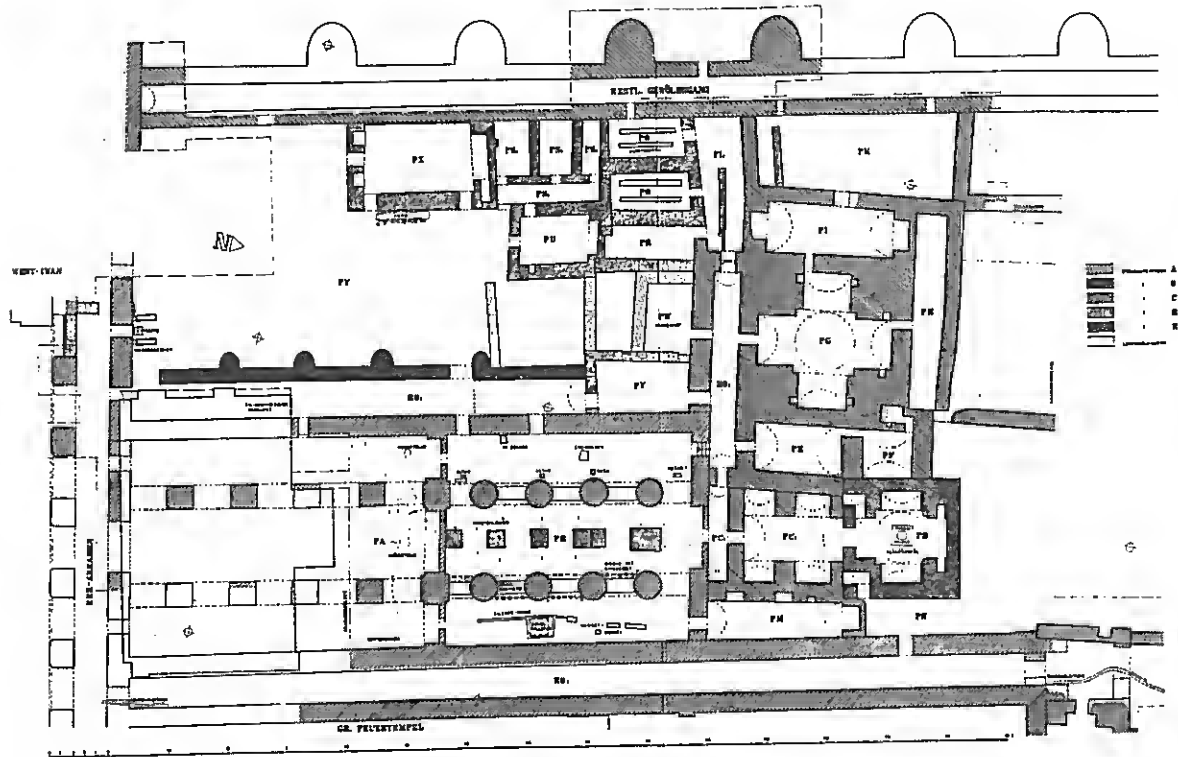
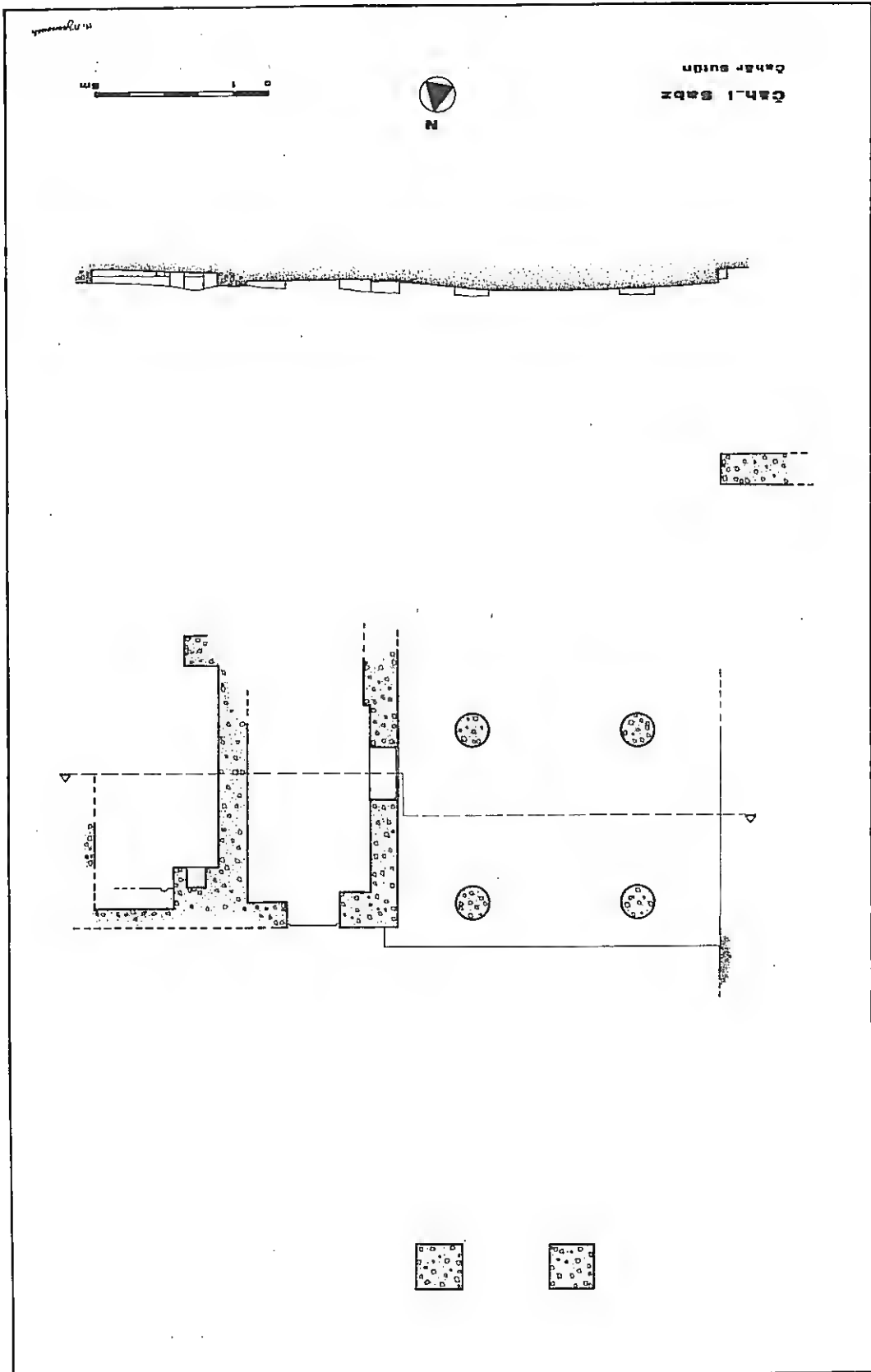


Fig. E - Tak̄t-e Solaymān, Columned Halls (from D. HUFF, « Die Steinbauten », *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1975), Fig. 61).

The building, only partially uncovered, contains a low platform with the remains of four round pillars (Fig. F). Next to this platform, there are two large rooms. The first room has access both to the platform and outside, but the connection between the second room and the first two sections is not yet clear. The second room, however, has two niches in front of which we found a baker clay object in the form of a crescent on a stepped pedestal with horns. I suggest that this is an emblem of Anāhita, but the reasons for this identification are too complex to be discussed here in detail. We can briefly say that it is very similar to the stele from the temple of Atargatis (Hadad's consort) in Dura Europos and the emblem of Tanit (Ba'al-Hamman's consort—Phoeni-

Fig. F - Çahar Sotun.



cian Punic cultural realm, especially in North Africa). This symbol has frequently been engraved on the Sassanian seals. Moreover, the emblem is frequently struck on some series of the Kūšāno-Sassanian coins<sup>24</sup>. We know that Nanaia (Anāhita?) was the most venerated goddess of this country.

The plan of the building with this object, although smaller, shows much similarity with Nūšijān's Columned Hall and Old Western Building combined (Fig. C, L. 2 and 4). In both buildings columned areas are connected directly and closely with two rooms. At one end of the second room, left hand side in both cases, there is a niche or wide recession in which once a cult object was probably standing<sup>25</sup>.

If the small scale building of Čahār Sotūn is an Anāhita temple its similarity with the combined Old Western Temples and the Columned Hall of Nūšijān helps establish the function of these two sections, and by consequence, that of the columned hall of Taḳt-e Solaymān.

Now we have two forms of building devoted to the cult of Anāhita. One is the square areas of Ḥājīābād and Bīšāpūr and the other, the large, columned halls of Nūšijān, Čahār Sotūn, and Taḳt-e Solaymān. The first two have most probably been part of private residences and therefore may have served as private chapels, while the second group were public places, temples in fact. This group is adapted to the Avestic prerequisites for Anāhita temples while the second group did not follow these obligations, probably because of their smaller scale.

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<sup>24</sup> M. AZARNOUSH, « A new Sassanian Temple in Eastern Fars », *Iranica Antiqua* 19 (1984), pp. 167-200. A similar device, with the difference that on it the crescent is replaced by a cross, is worked out on a box now in the Treasury at Limburg. The enamelled silver-gilt container, considered a great masterpiece of court craftsmanship, was made in 964-965 for Basil, son of Romanus I (J. BECKWITH, *The Art of Constantinople*, London, 1961, pp. 87-88, Fig. 116). Identical crosses, chiseled on stone steles and grave stones, are found widespread in an area extending from Nepal and Ceylan to Rome and Egypt. They range from 6th century on and give birth, with the elimination of the stepped pedestal, to the « leaved cross » (D. TALBOT RICE, « The Leaved Cross », *Byzantinoslavica* 11 (1950), pp. 72-81). W. KLEISS, « Bericht über zwei Erkundungsfahrten in Nordwest-Iran », *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* N.F. 2 (1969), pp. 112-13; G. GROPP, « Die Pahlavi-Inschrift auf dem Thomaskreuz in Madras », *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* N.F. 3 (1970), pp. 267-71. For the last reference I am grateful to Prof. F. Pennacchietti. The eastern origin of this motif is underlined by D. Talbot Rice (« Leaved Cross », p. 81).

<sup>25</sup> The recession or wide niche of room 46, the main room of the Old Western Building of Nūšijān, besides two lateral niches, shelters a « low plinth 2-3 cm high and 80 cm square, in a free standing position beneath the apex... » (D. STRONACH and M. ROAF, « Nūsh-i Jān: third interim report », p. 4). Stronach suggests that « this plinth therefore may be all that remains of a truncated altar » (*ibidem*).